

# PUBLIC PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT IN AUSTRALIA

Report of a talk given on the 4th November, 1955

*by*

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*(Summary record of a lecture delivered by  
Mr. H.J. Wright, Principal Training Officer,  
Commonwealth Public Service Board,  
Australia.)*

Speaking at a meeting of about 80 members of the Indian Institute of Public Administration on 'Public Personnel Management in Australia' on Friday the 4th November, 1955, Mr. H.J. Wright, Principal Training Officer, Commonwealth Public Service Board, Australia, observed that the general increase in the scope of government functions in his country had necessitated a new emphasis on the proper use of human resources for achieving greater efficiency and flexibility in administration. So far as personnel management was concerned the new demands on Government were being met by means of better selection, placement and training of staff, improved administrative methods and a general policy of improving personnel practices.

Mr. Wright stated that, in the Commonwealth Public Service, the personnel and establishment functions of each Department had been largely consolidated in a senior executive at about the level of the deputy secretary. The head of the personnel and establishment division, therefore, had a voice at the top and was able to develop and encourage a sound approach to personnel practice throughout the Department. The Service-wide personnel policy was, however, formulated by an independent personnel agency known as the Commonwealth Public Service Board. The Board's major function was to determine the establishment policy in terms of the Public Service Act and this included such



functions as, investigation of systems and methods, staffing and organising the Departments, position classification, determining of conditions of employment, control of recruitment, examinations and appointments, and development of staff training schemes.

Whilst the Board determined broad policy, there was substantial delegation of personnel management to the Public Service Inspectors in each state and to the Departments. Within each Department a Personnel and Establishment Branch performed much the same role for the Department as the Board did for the Service as a whole. Broadly speaking, the State Public Services had a similar system, although there were important differences in nomenclature, structure and degree of control exercised over the Departments by the central personnel agency. For instance, in New South Wales there was Public Service Board of three Commissioners and in the State of Queensland, a single Public Service Commissioner.

While permanent heads of all Departments in the Commonwealth Service were themselves managers and responsible for the good working of their Departments, the Board exercised wide powers in respect of the organisation and staffing of Departments. One distinguishing mark of the Australian system, Mr. Wright pointed out, was the existence of this focal point where sound personnel policies were consistently formulated and reviewed—the unique position enjoyed by the Commonwealth Public Service Board. In Australia, the Board dealt with all those establishment and personnel functions which, in the U.K. came under the control of the Treasury and in India were under the Ministry of Home Affairs. Mr. Wright felt that personnel functions of such a central agency, viewed in a broader

perspective, should obviously comprise the following :

- (a) The regular inspection of office systems and methods.
- (b) The regular review of establishment, that is, of the size and nature of departmental organisation, the suitability of staffing arrangements and position classification, etc.
- (c) The oversight of conditions of employment, including employer-employee consultation, remuneration, awards, salaries and allowances, hours of work, disputes, leave and furlough entitlements, welfare and physical working conditions.
- (d) Effective staffing of the Service by means of suitable recruitment and examination policies, selection and placement of staff according to aptitude, devising promotional sequences, and the like.
- (e) Development of appropriate central training schemes, assessing training needs, advising on and stimulating departmental training.
- (f) Advice and assistance on the maintenance of staff records and statistics, personnel research and an information service on personnel management.

Mr. Wright then answered questions put to him. These questions and the replies are summarised below :

### The Commonwealth Public Service Board

1. *Constitution : How are the members chosen ? Are they drawn from the Civil Service or from public life ?*

The Board consists of three Commissioners, each of whom is appointed for a term of five years, but individual members come up for re-appointment in successive years. Appointments to the Board are made by the Governor-General on the recommendation of the Government, and the members are usually chosen from former Permanent Heads of Departments. However, there is no requirement that the Commissioners should come from the permanent officers of the Service and appointments have, in fact, been made from outside. The Board operates under the Commonwealth Public Service Act and has necessary regulation-making powers.

*2. Is the Board itself organised on a functional basis, i.e., are individual members responsible for particular items of work or are decisions taken by the members sitting together?*

The Chairman deals with high level policies relating to Public Service organisation and management, and tends to take a "mountain-top view". The other two Commissioners are broadly responsible for :

- (a) Organisation, methods and systems, position classification and establishment functions, as well as staff training.
- (b) Employer-employee relations, arbitration and general conditions of service, i.e., promotions, appeals, etc.

The Public Service Board meets about once a week under the Chairman, and all broad policy decisions are taken by the members, sitting together.

*3. Is the Board a part of the Executive Branch of Government? Or is it treated in law or by convention as an independent authority? To what extent are the Board's decisions and*

*advice bound to be accepted by the Government? What happens if any difference of opinion arises within the Board itself?*

The Board is an independent statutory authority and reports directly to Parliament. The Chairman of the Board keeps in close touch with the Prime Minister on broad Public Service management matters, for example, employment ceilings, but the Board is not subject to direction or control by Ministers individually, or by Cabinet, except on high level policy issues concerning the overall administration of the Public Service. The advice rendered by the Public Service Board to Cabinet and the Prime Minister is not necessarily binding on the Government, but it is usually acted upon. Its advice is sought on such important matters as the appointment of Permanent Heads, and so on.

### **Structure of Public Services**

*4. Are there separate Services for the Federal Government and the State Governments? Do the State Governments have Public Service Boards of their own?*

There are separate Public Services for each State and the Commonwealth. The States have their own Public Service Boards or Commissions. Broadly speaking, the States' legislation is similar to the Commonwealth Public Service Act, although some States have a single Commissioner rather than a multiple-member Commission or Board.

*5. Is there a classification of the Public Service into groups such as superior, subordinate or administrative, executive, clerical, or First Division, Second Division, etc.?*

The Commonwealth Public Service is classified into four main categories : first, second, third and

fourth Divisions. First Division contains only 29 members and consists of Permanent Heads and two or three other top ranking officials. The Second Division comprises senior administrative establishment, professional, scientific and technical officers, including the heads of State branches of Departments, all Assistant Secretaries, Assistant Directors-General, and officials of comparable status—a total of 315. The Third Division covers over 28,000 permanent officers of middle-executive and clerical type, but it also includes many general administrative and technical, professional and scientific personnel. Under the Fourth Division (approximately 53,000 permanent staff), come lower clerical and clerical assistants, manipulative grades, including technicians, postal staffs, air traffic controllers, army, navy, and defence operatives, storemen, customs and excise officers, etc. The First and Second Divisions are usually referred to as the 'higher public service'.

6. *Is there a unified Public Service at the Federal level, or are there separate Services for separate functions, e.g., Income-tax, customs, posts and telegraphs, etc.?*

The Commonwealth or Federal Public Service is a unified Service, consisting of 25 Departments.

7. *Are there separate competitive examinations for recruitment to the different levels of the Service?*
8. *For what Government employment is the possession of a university degree essential for entry? What are the relative roles of "university education", "training in economics" and "specialised training in public administration"?*

Separate competitive examinations are held for recruitment to the Third and Fourth Divisions. The

Fourth Division examination for entry to the sub-clerical grades is in elementary English, Spelling and Arithmetic, and a trade test for entry to the manipulative and technical staff. Entry for the Third Division is mostly at matriculation and university degree standard, although some 200 Fourth Division officers annually qualify for the Third Division at a special internal examination.

University qualifications are essential for all professional and scientific posts, *e.g.*, in medical, engineering, law, geophysics, etc. A university degree is also essential for an increasing number of positions in the Second and Third Divisions, *e.g.*, for research and development, economic and statistical research and other specialised posts. One promotional sequence for young university graduates in Arts, Economics and Commerce is as follows :—

Research Officer, Grade 1.—Research Officer, Grade 2.—Senior Research Officer.—Principal Research Officer—Director of Research.

Other graduates also enter the general administrative field and receive promotion in the normal way.

9. *Are there separate Services for technical and professional classes with separate examination or recruitment by selection?*

Technical, scientific and professional officers are classified either in the Second or Third Division, according to the duties and administrative responsibilities involved. Recruitment is either by way of cadetship, with internal training, or appointment from outside at university degree level.

10. *Is any use being made of intelligence, psychological and aptitude tests, etc. for recruitment to the Service at any level?*

Psychological and aptitude tests are being used increasingly but they are mostly taken as supplementary rather than as final evidence of merit. For instance, candidates for university cadetships are given intelligence tests to determine likelihood of success at the university. Simple aptitude tests are also given to typists-in-training and to girls going into some of the postal occupations such as phonograph operators, telephonists, etc.

*11. How much of the higher level is filled in by promotion from below and how much by direct recruitment from outside?*

Practically all the First and Second Division posts are filled by internal promotion from the Second and Third Division, respectively. Promotion from the Fourth Division to the Third Division is by way of internal examination conducted by the Public Service Board. Direct recruitment from outside is very restricted, except for scientific and professional staff, e.g., medical officers, dentists, architects, physicists, chemists, etc. Even in the scientific field, cadetships are offered to school boys as recruitment incentives to join the Service and train as cadet engineer, cadet biochemist, cadet architect, cadet actuary, etc.

*12. Are there any kinds of posts "excluded" from the purview of the Public Service Board?*

*13. Are temporary appointments made without consulting the Board?*

The Public Service Board has strict control over all staffing of Ministerial Departments, both in regard to the form of organisation, establishment and recruitment of personnel. Temporary appointments are made by the Departments on the authority of the Public Service Board or its State Inspectors from the Board's temporary employment registers.

Under this category, certain classes such as external plant staff, day labourers, office cleaners, are recruited by the Departments, provided the Board grants exemption for such employment of these persons outside the conditions of the Public Service Act.

14. *How do nationalised undertakings, e.g., railways, airways, broadcasting, etc. recruit their personnel? Has the Public Service Board any say in this recruitment?*

Nationalised undertakings and public utilities usually operate under their own legislation and can recruit their own personnel. The Public Service Board does not have any say in this recruitment, although standards of entry and conditions of Service are broadly similar.

### **Training, Promotion and Merit Rating**

15. *Are there any unified training arrangements for new recruits to the Civil Service or does each Department organise its own training?*

The Public Service Board in Canberra has an Administrative Training Centre and directs a Service-wide training programme for clerical, executive and senior administrative staff from all Departments. Side by side with this central training, Departments conduct their own specialised administrative and technical training programmes which are carried out by separate departmental training units.

After World War II, the Board also established a comprehensive scheme for the training of personnel cadets which extends over four years and includes university as well as departmental training. The aim of this cadetship is to extend the development and application of effective personnel management as a specialised study and practice in the Service.

16. *Is there much lateral movement of personnel from Department to Department?*

There is considerable lateral movement at all levels.

17. *Are promotions made purely on the basis of merit? What weight, if any, is given to seniority?*

18. *How is merit assessed?*

Promotions are based primarily on relative efficiency; and seniority is only considered in the event of an equality of efficiency between two or more officers. Efficiency in this context implies special qualifications, (e.g., university degree) and aptitude for the discharge of the duties of the office to be filled, and also potential capacity for higher posts. In short, the chief criterion for promotions is : (a) superior efficiency; or (b) equal efficiency combined with seniority.

19. *Are there promotion examinations? What weight is attached to efficiency rating?*

20. *Has any attempt been made to introduce a system of awarding points or marks for various qualities?*

Barrier examinations are conducted in certain cases such as, audit inspectors, income-tax assessors and certain customs and postal staff. Rating reports are not universal due to difficulties encountered in regard to standardisation of rating factors and training of the raters. Their use is gradually spreading.

21. *Is there scope for an officer to make a representation if he feels that he has been unfairly superseded?*

Yes. An officer who has been superseded can lodge an appeal to the Promotions Appeal Committee which has been specially constituted in each State by the Public Service Board. The Committee consists of : (a) an independent chairman appointed by the Board; (b) an officer nominated by the Permanent Head of the Department, in which the promotion has been made; (c) an officer nominated by the appropriate staff organisation. The decision of the Appeals Committee is final up to a certain salary range, but promotions above this level are determined by the Public Service Board, in the light of recommendations made by the Promotions Appeal Committee.

### Conditions of Service

22. *Are pay scales uniform throughout the civil services, both Federal and State? How do they compare with the remuneration paid in private industries and in nationalised enterprises?*

Pay scales are not uniform throughout the Commonwealth and State Civil Services, but the Commonwealth generally pays better than the State Services. On the whole, both these scales compare favourably with the salaries in private industry except in the case of high level managerial posts. The nationalised undertakings are, in most cases, required to consult the Public Service Board on questions of pay, salary scales, etc.

23. *Is all Government employment pensionable: (a) in the civil service proper, and (b) in nationalised enterprises?*

Yes. It may, however, be noted that all superannuation systems in the Public Service are contributory; both governments and officers

contribute. The staff of nationalised enterprises also contribute to the same fund.

24. *Is the procedure for disciplinary enquiries laid down in detail?*

25. *Is the Public Service Board concerned with disciplinary action in respect of (a) inefficiency, and (b) misconduct?*

The Commonwealth Public Service Act and Regulations lay down in detail, procedure for taking disciplinary action and conducting disciplinary enquiries. The Chief Officer has, in the case of Third and Fourth Division officers, definite delegations in respect of fines, reduction in salary or rank and transfer for offences like wilful disobedience, negligence in the discharge of duties, inefficiency or misconduct or breach of discipline. He can also recommend dismissal to the Public Service Board. The disciplinary powers for members of the First and Second Divisions lie with the Minister and the Permanent Head of the Department respectively, who can charge and suspend him and forthwith report the matter to the Board. The latter can institute a Board of Enquiry if considered necessary and impose such penalties as recommended by the Board of Enquiry, including reduction in rank or salary and dismissal.

In certain instances a punished officer can appeal to an Appeal Board, constituted as follows :—(a) a chairman appointed by the Public Service Board; (b) an officer of the Department to which the appellant belongs and not being an officer concerned in the laying of the charge; and (c) an officer who is the elected representative of the Division to which the appellant belongs. Such an Appeal Board may confirm, annul, or vary the Chief Officer's decision or recommend to the Public Service Board that the appellant be dismissed.

26. *Is it possible for an employee to go to a court of law on the grounds that the prescribed procedure was not followed?*

This situation would be unlikely to arise. Since judicial procedure is followed as above, it leaves little or no ground for appeal from the Public Service Board's decision.

### **Government-Employee Relations**

27. *Is there one Civil Service association or are there separate associations or trade unions for different grades or employees of different Departments?*

There is more than one association. The Civil Service associations are on a craft basis, e.g., professional, medical, and clerical associations. These have combined together to form country-wide unions, e.g., the High Council of Commonwealth Public Service Organisations and the Amalgamated Postal Workers' Union.

28. *What are the relations of such bodies with Government?*

The Civil Service associations negotiate with the Public Service Board and appear before the Public Service Arbitrator in representing their members on questions relating to salaries and conditions of work. As already noted, they are also represented on Salary Classification and Promotions Appeal Committees and the Joint Council which is described below. Many matters in dispute are settled by conciliation between the Employee Associations and the Public Service Board.

29. *Is there something comparable to the Whitley Council system?*

Yes. The Commonwealth Public Service Act provides for the establishment of a Joint Council constituted as under :

- (a) a representative of the Public Service Board who acts as chairman;
- (b) six departmental representatives nominated by Permanent Heads as requested by the Board; and
- (c) seven representatives of organisations of officers and employees.

The Joint Council is an advisory body which considers matters of general interest in the administration of the Commonwealth Service and makes recommendations as required to the Board for further action.

30. *Is there a distinction between industrial workers and non-industrial workers in Public Services in respect of the right to join unions or associations of workers, and the right to resort to strike?*
31. *Are Government employees allowed to become members of political parties?*

All public servants, whether professional, general administrative, clerical or industrial workers, have the right to organise and join unions and associations. Generally, however, industrial workers (e.g., carpenters, welders, etc.) join the Australia-wide union which represents their craft.

While civil servants have a right to vote and can join political parties, they cannot take active part in politics or make use of information which has come into their possession officially, for political purposes. Associations like those of postal and railway workers are politically affiliated and have at times wielded considerable pressure.

*32. Is there any special unit in the Federal Government for "O & M" work? What is the position in the States in this regard?*

Yes. The Public Service Board has a separate O & M Branch responsible for providing an advisory service for all the Departments. However, the latter also have O & M cells which are usually a part of the departmental personnel and establishment branch.

The State Public Services are also developing their own O & M investigation sections, though generally on a smaller and less specialised scale than in the Commonwealth sphere.

*33. What are, in your opinion, the secrets of getting a better out-turn of work, both in quality and quantity, from the junior officers and staff?*

No one measure would suffice to improve the quality and speed of work. Three factors are important in increasing efficiency of work, and these are : (a) systematic training of staff at all levels, including encouragement of part-time study at universities in the case of junior officers; (b) the careful selection and training of supervisory staff so as to ensure improved working methods and staff supervision. This would, in turn, ensure that supervisors devote more time to the counselling of subordinate staff, detection of aptitude and talent, the development of understudies, and planning of job rotation; and (c) more effective communication and interpretation of policy directives to staff on all levels.